

# Hard-Rock Mining

The Desert Southwest's turn-of-the-Century years are remembered as the era of the mining booms. The population was young and transient. The get-rich-quick virus was in every bloodstream. It was the action age before steel and gasoline.

Dynamite was used to shatter the solid rock, but before the fuse could be lighted, there was need for a man with hammer and drill to sink a strategically-placed hole in the hard granite for the dynamite.

There was quite a trick to drilling these holes. Some men became quite expert at it and with proficiency came pride. The best of these drillers were true and conscientious athletes, training hard for each match and keeping fit between contests. The performances they gave were poetry in brawn, endurance and skill.

For a time, there was a lively debate as to the difference in hardness between one local granite and another. As a result, Gunnison granite, declared the most uniform in consistency, became established as the official contest granite. Blocks of this material were quarried in Gunnison, Colorado, and shipped to the far corners of the mining country.

On July 4, 1903, two world records were set in Bisbee, Arizona, that will never be broken: the greatest double-handed drilling contest of all time and the single-handed drilling contest.

Today, the hard rock miners use machines, but the drilling contest goes on. It is not as spectacular or thrilling as the old days, but it surely is an afternoon of entertainment and fun watching the contestants drilling away with a six-pound hammer for ten minutes.

Article by Lillian Ninnis—Courtesy *Desert Magazine*/August 1961

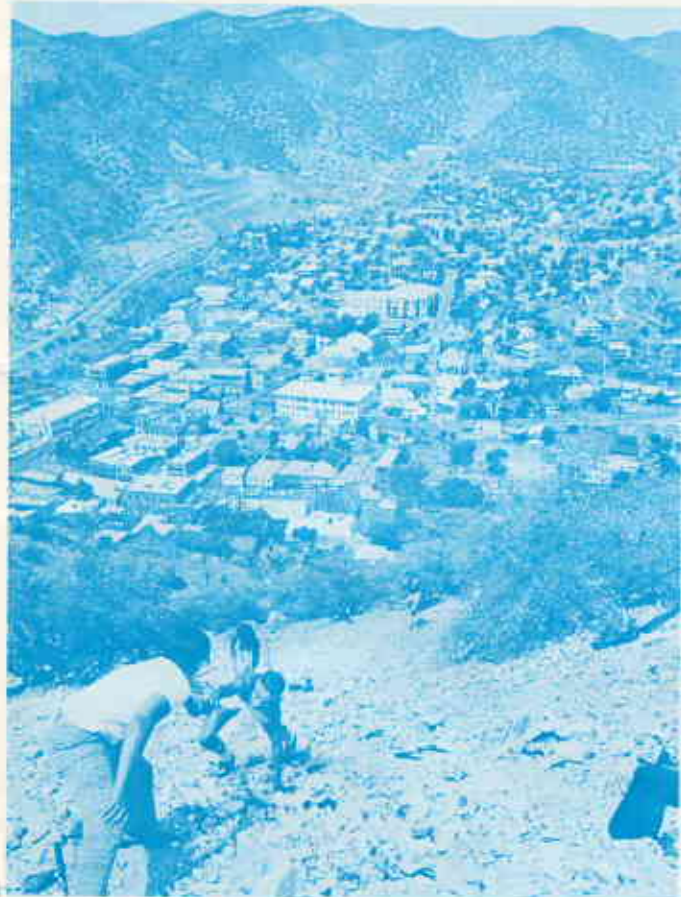


Photo Courtesy Gil Lutz  
**Ruben Garcia reaches for the top**

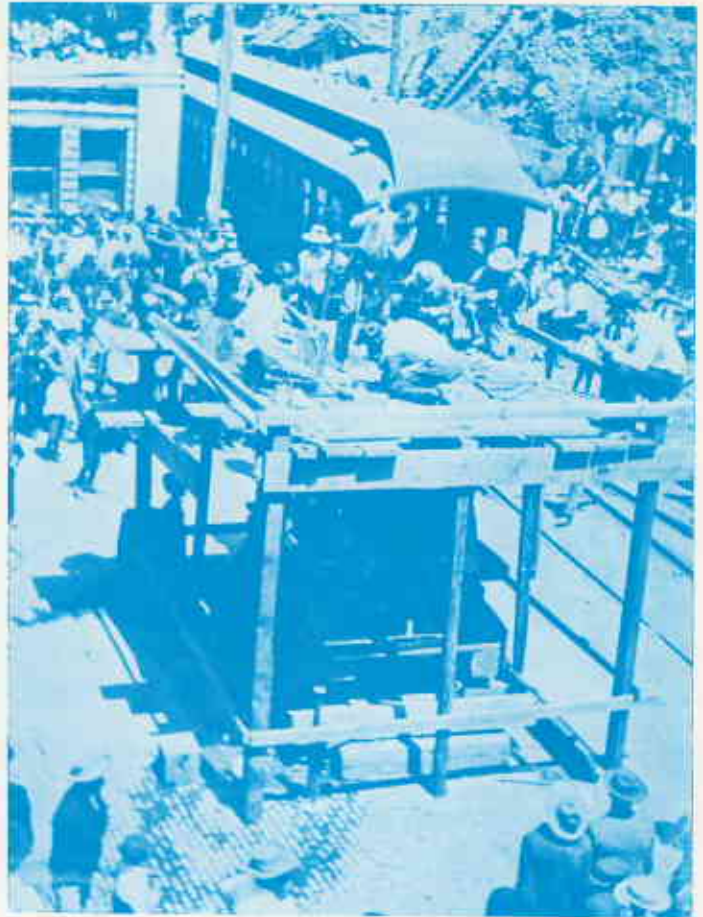


Photo Courtesy Bisbee Mining and Historical Museum

## Run Up "B" Hill

As one drives into Bisbee from the north, the first feature noticed is the formidable guardian of the old part of the city—"B" Hill, or Chihuahua Hill, as it is formally known. It rises high above Brewery Gulch, saved from having been mined away by virtue of being on the wrong side of the Dividend Fault to contain precious copper ore.

The hill's challenge is the "B" Hill Run that takes place every Fourth of July. Early in the morning of the usually scorching July day, dozens of youthful runners meet on Brewery Gulch to get ready for the run up the hill.

The run begins on asphalt and concrete, with the runners ascending several series of steep steps just to reach the hill. The first half seems to be a climb straight up, torturing the leg muscles to build up the speed needed to win the contest. The second half is a challenge to maintain control, not to go too fast back down the hill. A winning time on the torturous course is under six minutes.

Another July Fourth event comes from the town's mining heritage—the hand mucking contest. In this event, a miner competes to fill an ore car by hand in the fastest time.

When the underground mining operations began in Bisbee, hand mucking was more than just a sport—it was the only way to get the copper-rich ore from the deep deposits to the mill on the surface.

Since it was part of the way of life for the miners, however, they decided to incorporate it into their celebrations as well. Just as with hard-rock drilling, old-time miners used mucking contests to pit their work skills against those of others.